

MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

**401 North Washington Street, Suite 100
Rockville, Maryland 20850**

MEETING MINUTES

November 18, 2009

7:40 p.m.

ATTENDING

Leila Aridi Afas
Chandra Walker Holloway
Wilma K. Holmes
Resa Levy
Ivonne C. Lindley
Leticia Mederos
Manar S. Morales
Regina L. Oldak
Sanjay Rai
Jocelyn Samuels
Jaclyn Lichter Vincent

STAFF

Ruby V. Marcelo
Paula S. Rodgers
Judith Vaughan-Prather

ABSENT

Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Jennifer Cryor Baldwin
Jane Smith
Larniece McKoy Moore

I. CALL TO ORDER-APPROVAL OF AGENDA/MINUTES.....President Lichter Vincent

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 p.m. by President Lichter Vincent.

Commissioner Samuels requested that the proposed attendance policy be added to the agenda. Executive Director Vaughan-Prather noted the need for a vote to be taken on the Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women legislative ballot. Upon the motion made by Commissioner Levy, seconded by Commissioner Aridi Afas and unanimously adopted, the amended agenda was approved.

Commissioner Oldak noted an amendment was needed on page 3 of the Minutes, so noted by staff. Upon the motion made by Commissioner Aridi Afas and seconded by Commissioner Oldak, the Minutes of the October 28, 2009 meeting were unanimously approved as amended.

II. GUEST PRESENTATIONRyan Wechlser
Felony Family Violence Unit, States Attorney's Office

Ryan Wechlser was invited to speak to the commissioners about the January 2009 case involving a 17-year old Magruder High School girl who was raped by three of her classmates. Ms. Wechlser was the prosecuting attorney in the case.

Ms. Wechlser explained that the case was heard in Juvenile Court and some aspects of the hearing are confidential. She said that the boys were charged and subsequently pleaded "involved" in the crime. Two of the three boys returned to Magruder High School where the victim also attended. (The victim moved out of state because she had been harassed at school after the incident). An October 21, 2009 article in the Gazette Newspaper reported on the case and the victim's father's outrage over the trial Judge's remarks. The Gazette reported that the Judge lectured the people who in attended on behalf of the victim, telling them that they did not know the whole story, and that the girl "had issues." The Judge then proceeded to tell them what he thought the victim's issues were. As a result, the victim's father filed a complaint with the Maryland Commission on Judicial Responsibilities against the Judge.

MCCFW has always been concerned about the issue of relationship violence. CFW added acquaintance rape to its *"Let's Talk About Violence in Relationships"* brochure last year. The MCCFW expressed grave concerns about the assailants being allowed back into the same school attended by the victim, and about the Judge's reported inflammatory and insensitive comments.

Ms. Wechlser told the commissioners that their concerns were also expressed by many prosecutors in similar cases including concerns that:

- a) Judges are very much in need of training and education. Prosecutors often hear judges asking why cases go forward when the witnesses/victims aren't credible.
- b) Rape shield laws are often ignored (inadmissible issues are often allowed into evidence).
- c) Judges show insensitivity in cases of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and sexual assault.

The commissioners thanked Ms. Wechlser for coming in to talk about these very important issues. Ms. Wechlser was given a supply of CFW's *"Let's Talk About Violence in Relationships"* brochure.

III. BUSINESS MEETING

A. Judicial Conduct

The commissioners agreed that a response from MCCFW on the Magruder High School rape case was needed. (Apparently, Maryland is one of only three states that passed a law requiring school curriculum to address healthy dating relationships.) There was also agreement by the commissioners that many elements of the community failed the 17-year old rape victim, and that some kind of policy recommendation was needed to address the issues as well as a "roadmap" for prevention.

The Commission discussed the possibility of a letter to the editor. Concerns about the reports on the case include MCPS policy allowing adjudicated rapists back into school; insensitivity of judge's comments; training for judges; and prevention of similar incidents.

In the end, the Commission accepted Commissioner Holloway's offer to inquire into the kind of training judges routinely receive.

B. Bylaws Revision

The revised Bylaws were discussed at the September 23, 2009 CFW meeting and introduced at the October 28 meeting. At the October meeting, a motion was approved to further revise the Bylaws by removing the last sentence of Article X, Section 4 that *"Members must be physically present at a meeting for their participation to be considered as fulfilling the attendance requirements..."* Commissioners voted to remove the sentence from the Bylaws so that the issue of attendance at meetings could instead be addressed as a policy.

Upon the motion made by Commissioner Aridi Afas and seconded by Commissioner Morales, the revised Bylaws were unanimously adopted with the amendments.

Commissioners Walker Holloway and Samuels drafted an attendance policy and it was decided that this will be discussed at the Commission's January 27, 2010 meeting.

C. Pregnancy Center Legislation

On December 1, 2009, the County Council will hear public testimony on a bill proposed by Councilmember Duchy Trachtenberg that would require most "limited service pregnancy centers" — those that do not provide birth control, medical services or referrals for pregnancy termination — to post disclaimers that the information they provide to clients is not medical advice and is limited. They also would have to tell clients that the information does not establish a doctor-patient relationship.

Commissioner Aridi Afas moved that MCCFW support the County's bill; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Morales and adopted. Commissioner Oldak will share with staff some language for the letter which is to be drafted by staff.

D. MCPS Attendance Policy

Staff inquired whether MCPS considers it a legitimate excused absence when student mothers miss school while taking care of their child or taking the child to a doctor's appointment. It was learned that there was no system-wide policy for this type of absence. There is a "catch-all" provision that gives discretion to a school's principal on whether to excuse the absence. Further discussion on this issue was tabled to the January 27, 2010 CFW meeting.

E. Duration of Meetings

In September 2009, the Commission changed the start time of the remaining FY10 CFW meetings to 7:30 p.m. so that the Conference Planning Committee could meet from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. However, since that change, the Commission meetings have been ending later and commissioners have not been able to get through a full agenda.

Commissioner Oldak moved that the CFW meeting time return to a 7:00 start time. Discussion ensued and Commissioner Mederos moved that the meetings convene at 7:30 p.m., conclude at 9:00 p.m. and that time limits be established for each agenda item. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rai but failed with a 3 to 3 vote (with 2 commissioners abstaining). Commissioner Aridi Afas then seconded Commissioner Oldak's earlier motion to return to the 7 p.m. start time. This motion passed by majority vote. MCCFW meetings will return to a 7 p.m. start time beginning with the January 27, 2010 meeting.

IV. NACW CONFERENCE AGENDA PLANNING (CAP) COMMITTEE.....Aridi Afas

- A. The Memorandum of Understanding between the MCCFW and NACW has been signed by the County Executive's Office and by Executive Director Vaughan-Prather and is waiting for signature by the County Attorney's Office.
- B. Fundraising is underway—letters have been sent to potential corporate donors and current and former commissioners. The Department of Labor Women's Bureau proposal has been sent. The letter to the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues asking the Caucus chairs to host a Capitol Hill briefing has also been sent. Discussions are underway with MCDOT to determine if it may provide transportation for the conferees' visit to Capitol Hill.

A couple of commissioners have taken fundraising packets; Commissioner Levy asked those commissioners to please follow-up with their potential donors. Commissioner Mederos stated that she will have several potential donors within the next week.

- C. The "Save the Date" notice was mailed out with the NACW annual membership drive.
- D. Commissioners were asked to mark the dates of the NACW conference on their calendars now—July 22-25, 2010 and they were reminded that their hands-on help will be needed with the conference. As the host commission, commissioners will be needed throughout the conference. A task list will be discussed when CFW reconvenes in January.

V. NEW BUSINESS

- A. The Official Ballot of the Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW) was presented to commissioners. Upon the motion made by Commissioner Morales, seconded by Commissioner Oldak and unanimously approved, the recommended rankings for the seven legislative initiatives were accepted as follows:

- 1 – Family Responsibilities Discrimination
- 2 – Unemployment Insurance - Alternative Base Period
- 3 – Survivor-Centered Sex Crimes-Definitions
- 3 – Health Care Affordability Act
- 3 – Civil Orders of Protection – Protection from Re-abuse
- 3 – Insurance—In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) Benefit
- 3 – Collective Bargaining for Child Care Providers

Staff will complete the 2010 Official Ballot with MCCFW's rankings and return it to MLAW before the December 4, 2009 due date.

VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Mothers and Poverty Policy Agenda (MAPPA) - Community Outreach

MAPPA has received a number of speaker requests from organizations asking to be briefed on the Mothers and Poverty Agenda for Action. President Lichter Vincent said that it was important for commissioners to participate at these events.

B. Women's Legislative Briefing

The full Commission does not meet again until January 27, 2010—days prior to the January 31, 2010 Women's Legislative Briefing. Commissioners are encouraged to register and attend this important event.

VII. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Commissioner Morales addressed the Women's Network Advisory in Camp Springs, Maryland; a group convened through Congressman Steny Hoyer's 5th Congressional District office. Commissioner Morales presented the MAPPA Report. Commissioner Morales said that the group was extremely complimentary of MCCFW's work and she said there was talk about emulating what the Commission has done.

B. On November 12, 2009, the County Council's committees on Health and Human Services and on Education met jointly for an update on child care subsidy programs and to discuss the recommendations of the Mothers and Poverty report as they relate to the County's childcare subsidy program. Executive Director Vaughan-Prather and Legislative/Budget Specialist Marcelo attended the worksession and were called upon to answer questions about the MAPPA report.

Commissioner Rai, who serves as the Provost to Montgomery College's Germantown Campus was also present at the joint worksession in order to present the College's responses to the MAPPA recommendations related to education. Commissioner Rai spoke about the need for a more broad approach for helping students attend college.

- C. President Lichter Vincent announced that the CFW Executive Committee will meet on December 9. Staff will email commissioners about the status of the MAPPA Committee meeting.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Commission for Women, the meeting was adjourned at 9:24 pm.

**Minutes Submitted By
Paula S. Rodgers
Montgomery County Commission for Women**